

**United States Environmental Protection Agency
Criminal Investigation Division
Investigative Activity Report**

Case Number

1000-0487

Case Title:

Pacific Steel and Recycling

Reporting Office:

Seattle, WA, Area Office

Subject of Report:

20150818 Phone Contact with Washington State Department of Ecology

Activity Date:

August 18, 2015

Reporting Official and Date:

(b) (6), (b) (7)(C)

Special Agent

Approving Official and Date:

(b) (6), (b) (7)(C)

Assistant Special Agent in Charge

Assistant Special Agent in Charge

25-AUG-2015, Signed by: (b) (6), (b) (7)(C)

25-AUG-2015, Approved by: (b) (6), (b) (7)(C)

SYNOPSIS

On August 18, 2015, SA (b) (6), (b) (7)(C) contacted (b) (6), (b) (7)(C) a Washington State Department of Ecology Hazardous Waste Inspector regarding the chlorine gas release at the Pacific Steel and Recycling which occurred on August 12, 2015, in Spokane, Washington.

DETAILS

On August 18, 2015, I contacted (b) (6), (b) (7)(C) a Washington State Department of Ecology Hazardous Waste Inspector regarding the chlorine gas release at the Pacific Steel and Recycling which occurred on August 12, 2015, in Spokane, Washington. After being notified of the nature of the phone call and the identity of the agent, (b) (6), (b) (7)(C) in substance, provided the following information:

On August 12, 2015 at approximately 0945 hours, a gas cylinder was punctured at the Pacific Steel and Recycling plant (PSR) in Spokane, Washington, injuring multiple workers at the plant and at least thirteen people from the scene were hospitalized. On August 17, 2015, an employee of PSR succumb to his injuries and passed away.

(b) (6), (b) (7)(C) was called by Spokane Fire representatives and provided assistance in the situation. HAZMAT teams from Fairchild Air Force Base and the State of Idaho were called in to work on the situation. Testing from the site determined that it was a cylinder, containing chlorine gas, which was ruptured and the gas within released to the environment.

Multiple buildings and homes in the surrounding area were evacuated by Spokane Fire until the scene at PSR was considered secure.

The fire department and its teams remained on scene until Wednesday evening when the site was released back to the company. PSR hired Clean Harbors Inc (CHI) to provide cleanup of the contaminated site. CHI set up a "hot zone" around the cylinder, which during the release, has contaminated the area with corrosive material. CHI has several drums of waste containing the materials on site which were contaminated with corrosive acid. CHI has taken many pictures of the cylinder and recovered identification numbers from the cylinder.

According to preliminary interviews with PSR employees, workers at the recycling site believed the cylinder to be a roller, such as one used in lawn care. The scrap was loaded into the sheer machine and began the process of cutting the material for recycling when the cylinder was slightly crushed and a welded seam on the cylinder burst and allowed the gas to escape.

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The PSR property is split into two sections, east and west. The east side is the location of the PSR office while the east side is the recycling operation area. The release of the chlorine gas was on the east side of the PSR plant. A PSR employee, (b) (6), (b) (7)(C), witnessed, from approximately 700 feet away, the release and saw a yellow cloud of material appear in the area. He took a picture of the cloud and witnessed several of the employees in the release area “staggering” around.

Within a short time after the release, it was determined that the cylinder was delivered to PSR by (b) (6), (b) (7)(C) of Lewiston, Idaho. (b) (6), (b) (7)(C) has been delivering scrap product to PSR for several years. According to receipts of the delivery, (b) (6), (b) (7)(C) was providing scrap from a job site located at 8119 N. Regal Street in Spokane, Washington. Pacific’s driver, (b) (6), (b) (7)(C), already delivered several loads of scrap to PSR from the job site prior to the release. The load delivered just prior to the release was a large container, roll off type containing scrap from the Regal jobsite.

(b) (6), (b) (7)(C) was contacted by PSR shortly after the release and (b) (6), (b) (7)(C) returned to the scene almost immediately. (b) (6), (b) (7)(C) was telling PSR personnel that he believed the cylinder contained a combination of acetylene and baking soda. PSR accepts propane cylinders, but has a third party empty the tanks and returns the empties for recycling. (b) (6), (b) (7)(C) was aware of the PSR cylinder handling procedures.

The property owner of 8119 N. Regal Street in Spokane is (b) (6), (b) (7)(C) of Montana. (b) (6), (b) (7)(C) is leasing the property to two separate companies, L&S Tire Services and a company called IBETS. According to a PSR employee named “(b) (6), (b) (7)(C),” a company representative of L&S Tire phoned PSR shortly after the release to explain that L&S Tire employees witnessed someone taking cylinders from the back of a local building.

PSR has been cooperative with the Washington State investigation and he has been working directly with (b) (6), (b) (7)(C), the health and safety officer for PSR. PSR has hired a private investigator to investigate the origins of the chemical cylinder.

Chlorine in this type of cylinder is typically used for chlorinating water in swimming pools and public water systems.